

**DECISION NOTICE
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE
Colson Creek Rock Pit Project**

**USDA – Forest Service
Salmon-Challis National Forest
North Fork Ranger District
Lemhi County, Idaho**

December 2004

I. DECISION AND REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The North Fork Ranger District has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Colson Creek Rock Pit Project. I have decided to implement Alternative 2, the proposed action. In order to reach this decision I reviewed the effects analysis presented in the EA, considered consistency with the Forest Plan, completed a Finding of No Significant Impact, and reviewed public comments submitted on the proposal.

My decision is tiered to and implements the goals, objectives and desired future conditions of the Salmon National Forest Land and Resource management Plan.

Implementation of Alternative 2 will result in development of a rip rap source rock pit located adjacent to the Colson Creek Road (FS Rd # 123) 1.6 miles from the Salmon River Road.

The FLRMP states that “Sources of rock suitable for riprap material in the Salmon and Lemhi Rivers are limited” (FLRMP pg. II-55.) Development of this rock pit will help to maintain the Salmon River Road to the standards defined in the FLRMP of an arterial road (pg. IV-65). Maintenance to these standards will help attain the Forest goal (FLRMP pg. IV-4) of a transportation system that provides safe, economical, functional and environmentally sound access for managing and protecting the Forest resources.

II. PURPOSE AND NEED

The need to develop a rock pit down stream of the Cove Creek Bridge arose when the load capacity for the Cove Creek and Pine Creek bridges on the Salmon River Road ((FS Rd # 030) were downgraded in 2003. The load limits on the bridges were reduced significantly. Until the bridges are fixed it is cost prohibitive and inefficient to use rock sources upstream of the Cove Creek Bridge for repairs downstream of the bridge.

A rip rap source is necessary below the Cove Creek Bridge to complete repairs to the Salmon River Road at Fountain Creek where it was damaged by high water in the spring of 2003. There is also a need to develop a long-term rip rap and road surfacing material source near the lower end of the Salmon River Road.

There is also a need to develop a material source outside the federally designated Wild and Scenic Salmon River Canyon since source material adjacent to and along the Salmon River Road cannot be consistently used without impacting the outstandingly remarkable values within the Wild and Scenic River corridor, (FLRMP p. IV-155).

Implementation of Alternative 2 meets the purpose and need for the project. It also is consistent with FLRMP goals and standards and guidelines for transportation system management and the maintenance and protection of other resource values.

III. Alternatives Considered

I considered one "action" alternative and the "no action" alternative. These two alternatives provided a reasonable range of alternatives to consider based on the absence of significant issues. Additionally several alternatives were proposed but were not viable alternatives and were not analyzed in detail. These alternatives are summarized in this section.

There were no issues that could not be resolved with the proposed action, therefore there is only one action alternative.

Alternative 1 - No Action

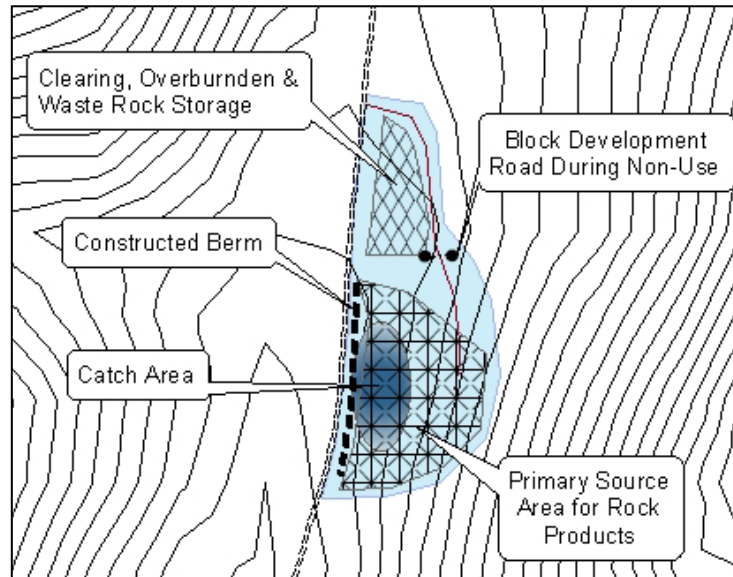
This alternative, required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), would be to leave the proposed material source pit undeveloped. This alternative represents the existing condition against which the action alternative is compared. This alternative does not meet the purpose and need developed for the project. It does not address the need to develop a rock source below the Cove Creek Bridge or the immediate need to complete repairs to the Salmon River Road at Fountain Creek, or the need for a long-term rip rap and road surfacing material source for the lower end of the Salmon River Road and adjacent areas.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

My decision implements this alternative which would authorize the development of the Colson Creek rock pit.

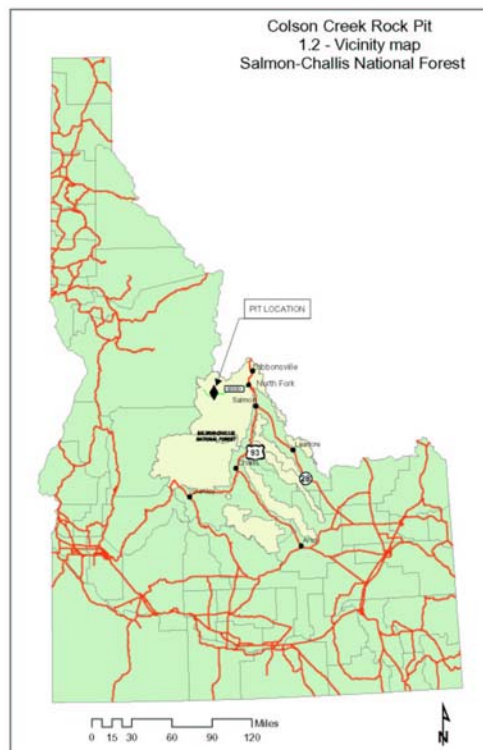
The pit will be adjacent to the Colson Creek Road 1.6 miles up from the Salmon River Road, Project Location Map 1.1 and Vicinity Map 1.2. The legal description of the project location is T 23 N, R 16 E, NW ¼, SE ¼, Section 24 in

FLRMP Management Area 4A – Big Game Winter Range. Management Area 4A emphasis is on managing key big game winter range to insure required forage and cover conditions exist to meet big game needs.



Project Location, Map 1.1

The primary product from the pit would be riprap type material, class 1 through 5, but may include crushed gravel products if the rock proves suitable. Crushing would likely occur on-site concurrent with road improvement projects on either the Salmon River Road or the Colson Creek Road.



Vicinity Map 1.2

Target rock material is in the rock outcrop at the south end of the project area, Photo 1.1. A shallow pit and berm would be used to catch rocks and prevent them from entering the Colson Creek Road or Colson Creek as the pit is developed.



Photo 1.1 - Colson Creek Road and Rock Out Crop

Vegetative clearing would occur on 1 ½ to 2 acres during the life of the pit resulting in the removal of an estimated 6 CCF of timber, Photo 1.2. Not all of the area would be cleared at one time. Only the area of operation at each entry would be cleared. The timber will be piled on site and sold commercially if there is a market.



Photo 1.2 - Vegetation

Vegetative slash, overburden (soil) and non-suitable rock would be stored on the flat area at the north end of the project area. It is anticipated that this

material would be available for future reclamation and rehabilitation of the site when usable products are exhausted.

A short development road 500 to 800 feet in length would be constructed to access the top of the pit. Either an excavator or air-track drill would be used to remove the rock from the outcrop. The road would be constructed to the minimum width required to move the equipment into position. During non-use periods this road would be blocked using rock barriers at the approximate location as indicated in Map 1.I. The road will be for administrative use only and will be closed at the end of the pit life.

Dust control would be accomplished as needed by either watering or use of a chemical dust palliative to prevent fugitive dust and sedimentation along the Colson Creek Road. The primary trigger for implementing dust control would be the generation of observable dust. Incidental removal of a few loads for small projects would generally not create enough dust to justify the added expense of dust control. Palliatives are generally selected based on cost and surface materials to be treated. For short duration projects water may provide adequate control and economic efficiency.

Prior to the development of the pit the inside ditch and cross drain culverts along the Colson Creek Road below the project area will be cleaned. Hand-placed rock check dams will be placed on the sections of the Colson Creek Road with greater than 6% grade. The inside ditch will be completely rock lined through these sections after the pit is developed, providing there is sufficient material.

Traffic control on the Colson Creek Road will occur during blasting and periods of heavy truck traffic. These may consist of short-term road closures and/or flagging as needed.

Appropriate fuel storage and fueling (Appendix 1 – Spill Prevention Plan) will be incorporated into the design and operation of the pit. Equipment used off road on the Salmon-Challis NF will be washed and inspected prior to mobilization for the project to prevent the spread and establishment of noxious weeds. Weed control measures will also include herbicide application.

This project would be initially implemented to fortify the Salmon River Road in the vicinity of Fountain Creek. After this initial need, the pit would be used on an as needed basis to supply rock products for future projects.

Other Alternatives Considered

The following alternatives were considered during the planning process but were not studied in detail.

- Terrace scree slopes adjacent to the Salmon River Road to make parking areas and widen the road. This alternative was not considered because a

rock source cannot be developed within the wild & scenic river corridor (FLRMP IV-154). Scree rock is also not large enough to be used as rip rap.

- Use rocks that fall from the cliffs along the river road. This alternative is not feasible because the fallen rocks are not a consistent quantity or quality.
- Using rock from a source other than the proposed Colson Creek location was not further analyzed because it is cost prohibitive. The closest rock source known to exist is approximately 8 miles up the Panther Creek Road. This option was dropped from further consideration due to the additional haul distances and because large heavy loads cannot be hauled over the Cove Creek bridge. An off site source would significantly raise the cost and lower the efficiency of any projects on the lower Salmon River Road.

IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The project proposal was published in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) through all four quarters of 2004 (January – December). The SOPA is published on the Forest web page and is mailed to approximately 150 people and organizations. A legal notice announcing scoping of the project was published in the Salmon, Idaho “Recorder-Herald” newspaper on February 5, 2004. Scoping letters were sent to 50 persons and organizations on February 2, 2004, the letter was also published on the Forest’s web page under “Projects and Plans”.

This analysis was completed under the revised 36 CFR 215 appeal regulations, effective June 4, 2003. These revised regulations have stringent requirements on commenting. The applicable requirements were included in the scoping letter and in the legal ad.

Agencies consulted include: Idaho State Historic Preservation Office; Shoshone-Bannock Tribes; US Fish and Wildlife Service; NOAA Fisheries; Core of Engineers; Idaho Departments of Fish and Game, Environmental Quality, and Water Quality.

The district received six letters from groups and individuals in response to the scoping letter; these comments are addressed in the environmental assessment. The summarized comments can be found in Appendix 1.

An Interdisciplinary Team was formed to analyze the proposals effects on the environment. Specialist reports can be found in the project file and their findings are incorporated in this document.

V. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

My review of the analysis prepared by the ID Team indicates Alternative 2 responds to public concerns and is consistent with management direction in the

Forest Plan. Provisions of 40 CFR 1508.27(b) indicate project significance must be judged in terms of the project context and intensity. I have determined it is not necessary to prepare an environmental impact statement because there are no significant impacts associated with this project. My rationale includes:

Context

The effects of the Colson Rock Pit are localized with implications for only the immediate area. Cumulative effects of past management, combined with the current proposal, and reasonably foreseeable future actions were analyzed for each resource in the EA. These effects were considered in my determination. The selected alternative is consistent with the management direction and standards and guidelines outlined in the Forest Plan. Therefore, regionally and nationally this project is not significant.

Intensity

- *Consideration of both beneficial and adverse impacts:* I considered beneficial and adverse impacts associated with the alternatives as presented in the EA. The overall impact of the selected alternative will have a minor beneficial effect, with no significant adverse impacts. Impacts from the selected alternative are not unique to this project. Previous projects involving similar activities have had non-significant effects. Therefore, I determined that the specific and cumulative effects of the selected alternative are not significant.
- *Consideration of the effects on public health and safety:* This alternative will not significantly affect public health and safety. The development of a rip rap source rock pit in the lower section of the Salmon River Road will provide a material source available for repairs to be performed efficiently thus maintaining the safety and functionality of the lower Salmon River Road. This project does not involve national defense or security.
- *Consideration of the unique characteristics of the geographic area:* The selected alternative will not affect any unique areas, historic features, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

Based on this information, I conclude Alternative 2 will have no adverse effects on unique resources.

- *The degree to which the effects on the quality of human environment are likely to be highly controversial:* All actions to be implemented are similar in type and intensity to activities that have occurred in the recent past. Based upon my past experience on similar projects, I do not expect the effects of these actions on the quality of the human environment to be highly controversial. I have determined that the effects as displayed in

the EA and supporting documentation in the project file are not likely to be highly controversial.

- *The degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:* The selected alternative is similar to many past actions across the Forest and region, and its effects are reasonably expected to be similar. Based upon my knowledge of past actions and professional and technical knowledge and experience, I am confident that we understand the effects of these activities on the human environment. There are no unique or unusual characteristics about the area or selected alternative that would indicate an unknown risk to the human environment.
- *The degree to which this action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about future considerations:* The selected alternative is site specific to the project area and consistent with the Forest Plan. Therefore, this is not a decision in principle about future considerations and is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects.
- *Consideration of the action in relation to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulative significant effects:* Cumulative effects analysis by resource area was conducted in the EA. No significant effects were identified as a result of this analysis. Cumulative effects of the selected alternative and other past, ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities are not expected to be significant due to protective measures developed in the project design and application of Forest wide standards and guidelines. I have therefore determined that there are no significant cumulative effects associated with this project.
- *The degree to which the action may affect listed or eligible historic places:* This project meets federal, state and local laws for protection of historic places (project record). SHPO concurrence concludes that no eligible or listed historic properties will be affected by the Colson Creek Rock Pit Project.
- *The degree to which the action may affect threatened, endangered or sensitive species or their habitat:* Biological Assessments and Evaluations were prepared for the project and are hereby incorporated into this decision document by reference. The BA's determined the proposed activities will have "no effect" on the Snake River sockeye salmon, threatened Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, threatened steelhead, threatened bull trout, Canada lynx and bald eagle; will not destroy or modify proposed or designated critical habitat for any of the listed fish species; and will not jeopardize the continued existence of the nonessential experimental population of gray wolf.

The BE's determined the proposed activities may impact the west slope cutthroat trout and habitat in the short term but shall not contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species; no negative and/or measurable effect on the Lemhi penstemon or on flammulated owls, their habitat, or prey species.

- *Whether the proposed action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:* Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA and project design. The action is consistent with the Forest Plan and meets NEPA disclosure requirements.

Management Indicator Species

Management Indicator Species (MIS) are defined as "plant and animal species, communities, or special habitats selected for emphasis in planning, and which are monitored during forest plan implementation in order to assess the effects of management activities on their populations and the populations of other species with similar habitat needs which they may represent" (FSM 2620.5). The Salmon-Challis National Forest recently amended its forest plans changing the species to be monitored to four that represent distinct habitat types found on the forest. Those four listed species are the Pileated Woodpecker for the coniferous community/habitat type; the Greater Sage-Grouse for the sagebrush community/habitat type; the Columbia Spotted Frog for the riparian habitat/community type; and the Bull Trout for the aquatic habitat/community type. (Proposed Amendments to the Management Indicator Species List for the Salmon and Challis Land and Resource Management Plans Environmental Assessment, DN/FONSI, February 2, 2004)

Within the project area habitat is largely unavailable and unsuitable for the spotted frog and greater sage-grouse; nesting habitat is not available for the pileated woodpecker and very little foraging habitat is present; and no Bull Trout are present in Colson Creek above the private land dam.

VI. Findings Required by Law, Regulation and Agency Policy

Numerous laws, regulations and agency directives require that my decision be consistent with their provisions. The following summarizes findings required by major environmental laws:

National Forest Management Act (16 USC 1600 et seq.)

NFMA and accompanying regulations require that several specific findings be documented at the project level. These are:

Consistency with Forest Plan (16 USC 1604(i)): The EA discussed the Forest Plan goals and objectives applicable to the project on page 6, 12, 14 and 21. I find the actions and activities described in the selected alternative are consistent with the Forest Plan standards and guidelines as noted on page 6 of the EA.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Central Idaho Wilderness Act Public Law 96-312 designated the Salmon River from North Fork to Corn Creek as a Recreational River. Implementation of Alternative 2 will not affect this designation.

Inventoried Roadless Areas and Research Natural Areas

There are no inventoried roadless areas or research natural areas in the project area and none will be affected by this project.

Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Standards

The integrity of the decision area's water and riparian features will be maintained as a result of the application of general Forest Plan standard and guidelines (Forest Plan, pages IV-43 to IV-46), Regional standards and BMPs as well as site specific protective design criteria (EA, page 2 - 5).

There are no 303(d) water quality limited stream segments or water bodies in the project area. The analysis indicates that implementation of Alternative 2 will not produce appreciable effects on water quality or soil productivity.

Endangered Species Act (16 USC 1531 et. seq.)

As required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BAs were prepared addressing the potential impacts to threatened and endangered species utilizing the project area. The analysis concluded that Alternative 2 would have "no effect" on the Snake River sockeye salmon, threatened Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, threatened steelhead, threatened bull trout, Canada lynx and bald eagle; would not destroy or modify proposed or designated critical habitat for any of the listed fish species; and would not jeopardize the continued existence of the nonessential experimental population of gray wolf.

Tribal Consultation

The Shoshone-Bannock tribe was sent a letter describing the proposal and requesting technical staff to staff consultation on this project on February 3, 2004. No reply was received from the tribes.

National Historic Preservation Act

I have consulted with SHPO pursuant to 36 CFR 800.14 implementing section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This project meets federal, state

and local laws for protection of historic places (project record). SHPO concurrence concludes that no eligible or listed historic properties would be affected by the Colson Creek Rock Pit Project.

VII. RIGHT TO APPEAL OR ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

This decision is subject to administrative reviews (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. Individuals or organizations who submitted substantive comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision. The Notice of Appeal must be in writing, meet the appeal content requirements at 215.14 and be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer:

Forest Supervisor
Salmon-Challis National Forest
50 Highway 93 South
Salmon, ID 83467

The Notice of Appeal, including attachments, must be filed (regular mail, fax, email) with the Appeal Deciding Officer at the correct location within 45 calendar days of publication of notice in the *Recorder Herald*, Salmon, Idaho. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time of appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Appeals submitted electronically, including attachments, must be in an electronic format compatible with Microsoft Word and sent to:

appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us

Hand delivered appeals will be accepted at the Salmon-Challis National Forest Offices during normal business hours (7:45 am to 4:30 pm) Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Implementation of decisions subject to appeal pursuant to 30 CFR part 215, may occur on, but not before 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period.

/s/ Terry Hershey

December 9, 2004

Terry Hershey
District Ranger

Date

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